



**TESTIMONY OF
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ON "HAZING IN THE UNITED STATES MILITARY"

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL**

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Introduction

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss issues related to military hazing.

As the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard ensuring our personnel are treated with dignity and respect is a responsibility I take very seriously.

The Coast Guard does not tolerate hazing. Hazing is contrary to our core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty and the nature of our missions.

The Coast Guard has published a clear and unambiguous policy prohibiting hazing, including requirements for initial training of all military service members, as well as annual training thereafter. When hazing has occurred our policy requires that offenders are held accountable. All Commanding Officers are required to investigate any hazing incident and initiate appropriate action to hold those accountable for hazing misconduct, as well as to ensure accountability within the chain of command if hazing was condoned.

Policy

The Coast Guard defines hazing as any physical, verbal or psychological conduct in which a military member causes another military member to suffer or to be exposed to any cruel, abusive, humiliating, oppressive, demeaning, or harmful activity, regardless of the perpetrator's and recipient's Service or rank. Soliciting or coercing another to conduct such activity also constitutes hazing.

The Coast Guard's hazing policy is found in the Discipline and Conduct Manual. The policy defines hazing, outlines roles and responsibilities, mandates annual training, and lists consequences. Furthermore, the policy clearly states that consent by the hazing victim does not obviate accountability of either the persons doing the hazing or the Command that condones or facilitates a hazing incident. Hazing incidents can be adjudicated under the provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Depending on the severity of the hazing incident, and how it is disposed of, punishment may include confinement, fines, reduction in rank, and/or punitive discharge from the Coast Guard.

Similar to hazing, prohibited harassment policy is found in the Coast Guard's Civil Rights Manual. Prohibited harassment is defined as including, but not limited to, unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, offensive, or hostile environment on the basis of an individual's protected status, which includes: race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, or any other basis protected by law. While hazing and prohibited harassment are similar, each type of case is reported and acted upon in a different manner. In each case, perpetrators are subject to prompt disciplinary action, including discharge and other actions authorized under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Incidents of prohibited harassment are processed in accordance with the Coast Guard's Anti-harassment and Hate Incident Procedures and as a complaint of employment discrimination pursuant to the Coast Guard's Civil Rights Manual.

Hazing typically occurs in connection with unofficial, unsupervised initiations or other informal "rites of passage" that are not authorized in the Coast Guard. Traditional ceremonies are permitted but must be conducted with proper command sanction and oversight to prevent harassment of any kind.

Assault and Sexual Assault are specific illegal acts defined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice and could potentially be committed during incidences of hazing. Incidences of assault or sexual assault occurring as part of hazing are aggravating factors, and therefore carry the potential for more severe consequences to offenders.

Recent Hazing Cases

In February 2010, the Coast Guard Investigative Service concluded a nearly year-long investigation into allegations that former crew members onboard Coast Guard Cutter VENTUROUS home ported in St. Petersburg, Florida, had engaged in hazing between the summer of 2007 and the spring of 2009.

As a result of the investigation, seven Coast Guardsmen were tried by courts-martial for the most serious misconduct related to hazing activities onboard the Coast Guard Cutter VENTUROUS between 2007 and 2009. Several other crew members received administrative action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice for less serious infractions. According to court records, the hazing took place in the berthing areas of the ship while underway and was done unbeknownst to senior leadership. The seven courts-martial resulted in five members receiving confinement or restrictions of up to five months, six members being reduced in pay grade, three members forfeiting pay, one member being discharged, and one member receiving a Bad Conduct Discharge.

In addition to the hazing on VENTUROUS, there have been three additional courts-martial stemming from hazing incidents since 2009. These included cases at Station Cape Disappointment, SECTOR Mobile and SECTOR San Francisco. Two of the cases are in final legal review. The third case is set for trial in April of this year.

Twenty-three Coast Guardsmen have been identified as the "targets," or victims of serious hazing misconduct. Eighteen, or 78 percent, of the victims are Caucasian. Other victims are distributed across many racial profiles to include one Asian-American, one African-American,

one Hispanic, one Hawaiian Islander and one Native American/Alaska Native. “Juniority” of rank appears to be the common characteristic of the victims of serious hazing misconduct.

Hazing Victim Racial Profiles

<u>White</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>
78% (18)	4% (1)	4% (1)	4% (1)	8% (2)	23

Suicide

No data is available to determine if hazing was or was not a contributing factor in any suicide that has occurred in the Coast Guard. Throughout the past ten years, the number of suicides has remained fairly consistent, averaging six active duty and reservist suicides per year, which represents roughly 0.01 percent of our workforce.

Leadership

Preventing hazing can best be achieved by addressing two key elements: training and leadership.

Awareness and support of the hazing policies are emphasized by senior leadership through the use of all-hands messages and other formal and informal outreach efforts. The Coast Guard Commandant as well as the Pacific and Atlantic Area Commanders recently released official messages regarding the responsibility of all Coast Guardsmen to comply with the Coast Guard’s zero tolerance hazing policy. The Commandant included a requirement in his message that all Commanding Officers and Officers in Charge read the message at the next quarters or appropriate muster to ensure his expectations and intent are clear. This sends a strong and clear leadership message from the top down.

Training courses held at the Leadership Development Center for Prospective Commanding Officers and Boat Forces Command Cadre include segments on hazing, ensuring our future leaders understand and enforce the policy.

Training

Hazing prevention cannot be achieved purely by the actions of our leaders. All personnel must understand that hazing will not be tolerated and no one may consent to being hazed. To ensure awareness throughout the military workforce, the Coast Guard provides initial training on hazing to all new accessions and requires annual unit training.

All Coast Guard Academy cadets receive annual training regarding hazing. The Leadership Development Center, co-located at the Coast Guard Academy, uses a formal curriculum (Officer Candidate School and Reserve Officer Candidate Indoctrination) to provide classroom based hazing training. All Cape May enlisted recruits receive formal training from a qualified instructor. The training provides the definition of hazing and proper actions to take if hazing occurs. During the lesson, recruits are given two scenarios to promote discussion. Upon completion the recruits take a test and must pass via a graded score.

Closing

As I close, let me emphasize that the Coast Guard places the highest priority on preventing hazing. We have a strong and clear policy, extensive training, and effective leadership. A healthy, positive, professional work environment is essential to eradicating hazing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.